

HSC BRIEFING

4 March 1957

UK POSITION IN ARABIA

- I. UK position of control, both in various Arab principalities along the Persian Gulf coast and in Aden Protectorate area, at foot of Arabian Peninsula--areas which are vital to Britain and important to all Western oil interests--is increasingly threatened by serious unrest.**
 - A. Britain's special position in backward Gulf states rests historically on treaties with local rulers which cede control of defense and foreign relations to the UK.**
 - B. Such treaty rights are particularly vulnerable to present hostile wave of Arab nationalism.**
 - C. For present, British apparently intend to refrain from policy innovations toward Gulf territories, for fear of deepening local Arab suspicion of UK intentions.**
 - 1. However, top leadership in London (including Labor party) has displayed determination to hang on in Persian Gulf.**
 - 2. British are presumably willing to use force, if necessary.**
- II. Considering principalities in clockwise order, can start at Kuwait, at head of Persian Gulf--this Sultanate claims world's largest proved oil reserves and formerly furnishing UK with over 60% of its crude oil imports.**

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B. Kuwaiti nationalist groups are even more hostile to UK since Suez adventure. Nationalists are gaining support for idea that immensely rich ruler of Kuwait is moving too slowly with political reform.

1. Egyptian influence in Kuwait is increasing especially in the schools.
2. UK official influence is weakening: British advisers are being dismissed, while the Sultan and his henchmen have become almost inaccessible to those UK officials remaining.

C. The US consul in Kuwait has reported his opinion that if worst comes to worst, the British are going to have to think about hanging on in Kuwait by force.

III. Next in order, the island Sheikhdom of Bahrain and the peninsular Sheikhdom of Qatar, are also scenes of increasing nationalist unrest. Both areas are important petroleum sites.

- A. At the important refinery center of Bahrain, Egyptian influence on public opinion seems especially strong.
- B. In Qatar, situation is complicated by a contest for popular support between rivals for succession to the throne. The Qatar ruler, himself, is believed involved in local Egyptian activities against the British.

IV. The next special segment of Arabian coast, the seven so-called "trucial sheikhdoms", are "protected" and administered by the UK Foreign Office's "Persian Gulf Residency". Little information is available on local conditions in these backward and thus far oil-poor principalities.

V. The next major British sphere of influence is the extensive Sultanate of Muscat and Oman. Egyptian assistance to refugee tribesmen from interior Oman suggests that Cairo is trying to step up agitation and subversion against this major UK ally.

A. In late '55, the Sultan's forces (British-led and British-supported) pushed into the interior and ousted the Sandis from the Buraimi Oasis. The Sultan's troops also reasserted control over the Imamate of Inner Oman--whose ruler did not recognize the Sultan's authority and had become a protege of the Saudi throne.

B. Omani refugees are now being brought from Saudi Arabia to Cairo. They may be receiving arms and fedayeen-type training from the Egyptians.

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VI. Finally, the situation in Britain's Aden Protectorate, at the southwest corner of Arabia, is already serious.

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A. Yemen, which is receiving arms and other assistance from the Soviet bloc, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria, is pushing a growing campaign of ambushes, raids and terror along the extensive Protectorate border. The Yemeni actions are aimed at subverting restless tribesmen and intimidating protectorate rulers in treaty relations with the UK.

B. Since the Imam of Yemen claims all of Aden Protectorate and Colony as his own territory, he is not interested in a mere settlement of disputed frontiers.

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